

Special Contributors.

A Chatty Letter from the States.

[FROM OUR CHICAGO CORRESPONDENT.]

With few exceptions, the stockmen of the west are in stringent financial circumstances: and it seems quite anomalous when one considers that the country is full of stock and full of grain and various kinds of feed. Hard times in the midst of plenty is rather a new order of things; but such seems to be the situation, and there are very few stockmen who are not compelled to seek support until such time as there will be a better demand for their stocks.

What are the causes of the depression, temporary though they may be? Fictitious values for fine stock, reckless extravagance and mismanagement of ranchmen and feeders, based upon false valuations. In short, there is one word which expresses all that is the matter with the cattlemen of the west, who, a few months ago, were feeling so puffed up over their prospects. That one word is "boom." We have the same cattle, the same owners, and just as many men willing to invest at good, reasonable, living rates; all that is the matter is that the boom has been punctured and has collapsed, and there is now a trying reaction from the illegitimate speculative values of a while ago.

The only practical difference I can see between the state of affairs now and then is that a year or so ago the men in the business, with of course notable exceptions, were half crazy over the booming prospects; and now they have quieted down to a rational basis. The dangers of the times have compelled men to exercise a little of that genius which is aptly termed the rarest of all genius, the genius of common sense.

Several prominent western fine stock breeders have come to grief, largely, it is said, through their part in trying to promote the booms which their respective breeds were enjoying a few months ago. It was the practice among a certain crowd of breeders to force the prices on their cattle, even if the breeders had to buy from one another, at outrageously high prices, which they often did. They were playing a desperate game to pull the wool over the eyes of novices who were wanting to buy into the cattle business, and some of them were beaten at their own game.

The legitimate market for fine cattle of the standard breeds is good enough for this time of the year, and breeders who are satisfied with reasonable market prices are very well satisfied with the outlook. But if you ask some of the boomers how the outlook is, you will be met with dreadfully long faces and ominous shakes of the head.

Thus far this year the arrivals of live stock at the Chicago market have greatly exceeded the arrivals during the corresponding time last year, particularly of hogs, and prices are now considerably lower than they were one year ago.

The hogs this year show a great improvement in quality over last. They are fatter and also better bred. It is a remarkable thing to look over fifty to sixty thousand head of hogs here in a day and perhaps not find half a dozen lots of white hogs. The Berkshire and Poland-Chinas have fairly crowded other breeds out, at

least one seldom sees any but the well known black and spotted hogs. The time was when black hogs were scarce, but now a load of pure white hogs in the yards is regarded as quite a curiosity.

The strong demand for thrifty young cattle to put on feed is indication that the farmers have the fattening material on hand, and that they have some confidence in the future of the beef market because they are paying relatively very high prices for good young stock.

There is talk among the western papers now that the old prejudice against white and mixed colored Shorthorns has received something of a setback among stockmen since the successful advent of Clarence Kirklevington. It is said that the success of that animal at the last Chicago Fat Stock Show will have a good effect in that direction. It seems absurd, because the prejudice heretofore against white cattle has been on account of their looks and the difficulty of keeping them looking presentable, far more than because of any real or supposed inferiority as beef cattle. But such slaves to fashion are we, that I verily believe if one or two of the best animals at the next great show should happen to be white, the old prejudice would be completely upset.

There is exactly the same objection to a white steer that there is to a white horse; he simply requires a good deal more work to keep in good appearance than one of any other color. But after the work has been done, what is more beautiful than a snow white horse or ox?

So deep is the color prejudice, that not a few reputable breeders are of the opinion that the solid red is a prominent characteristic and an unfailing indication of the excellent quality of a Shorthorn. This is simply nonsense. The solid reds are always more thought of and better cared for than the whites or even roans, but to claim a characteristic color for the best Shorthorns is rather ridiculous.

But it does seem odd that it is possible to find such a variety of colors among the Shorthorns, when every other breed has distinctive markings and color.

For a high class beef animal the Hereford-Shorthorn ox does not seem to have a peer in the judgment of some of the best makers of beef. Both Shorthorn men and Hereford men admit that it is an improvement on the thoroughbred of either kind. The fact that the Shorthorn men think it is crossing with their cattle that makes the Herefords better, and that the other people think *vice versa*, does not cut any important figure with the general public.

The best animal at the late Smithfield Club Show was a Hereford-Shorthorn. Somehow the intermixing of the two great breeds seems to give the qualities which gladden the hearts of the best butchers. In raising grade bulls for the western plains, breeders of Herefords seem to prefer grade Shorthorn cows to those of their own breed. But the opinion is held by men of experience that the first cross of the two breeds is the best and can never be improved upon by subsequent mixing.

There is something all wrong with the kind of material fed to our meat animals, and it seems time to call a halt and find what is wrong. Our cattle, hogs, and sheep of the so-called best quality come to market with a superabundance of blubber, grease and tallow. Everybody ad-

mires the outward appearance of these animals as they appear in the stalls, and they are usually sold to some helpless customer in high-toned hotels and restaurants, who is almost compelled to buy the "best" that comes to keep up his reputation.

As Mr. John Adams said to one of cattle feeders: "They spoil them with fat even at two years old." The proportion and distribution of fat is somehow all wrong. We are supposed to be making progress every year in the matter of making "marbled" beef, but the progress is really very slow; all of the talk about the rapid improvement to the contrary notwithstanding. Do we feed too fast? Or is the fault in the kind of feeding material used? A remark of "Marshfield's" in last number about the highest livers among the sporting classes of society preferring the meat of game to that of over-fed and under-exercised ones, reminds me that one reason why Texas and Western range cattle are so well liked is because their wild life and natural feed gives their flesh a certain gamey relish.

The average farmer cannot, and would not if he could, give his fattening animals enough exercise to develop muscle, and so it will be necessary in order to produce the best results to make a reform in the manner of feeding and to substitute feed that will make muscle, for that which is almost entirely fat producing.

Salt: Its Use and Abuse.

BY MARSHFIELD.

I came near calling the salt question a craze. In a craze the victim dies against light, and allows his passion to clope with common sense. With regard to the use of salt, however, both for man and beast, authorities disagree; and it is my purpose merely to draw attention to certain underlying principles which are evaded by writers on the subject. My reason for doing so is because there is at present a strong tendency amongst agricultural writers to create a boom; and when I read their articles I am constrained to believe that they cannot sleep soundly if they neglect to advise the farmers to keep a copious supply of salt in the manger or a huge hunk in the lane or the pasture field.

Such writers totally ignore the issue as to whether salt is intended for a food or a medicine, and I am therefore forced into the examination of both sides of the question. I shall open the case by asserting what cannot be denied, viz., that common salt is mineral or inorganic. Now science tells us that plants live on the mineral and animals on the vegetable kingdom. It does not alter the case to say that some animals live on the animal kingdom. If salt be a food, its defenders must now either prove that science is false or that salt is an exception to the rule. Here it must be positively understood that the common salt which is found in all plants is food for animals, and is absolutely essential to their existence; it is inorganic salts to which I take objection.

Of all the different varieties of salts found in plants, and consequently also in the soil, how can it be explained or conceived that common salt only is always deficient? How is it that this is the only kind of salt that can be used for food in the inorganic state? It is said that salt supplies sodium salts to the secretions of the body.